

BREAKING THROUGH STIGMA – ONE EVENT AT A TIME

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The 12th Annual Armenian Cultural & Food Festival, organized by the Armenian Relief Society (ARS), was bursting with Armenian heritage, culture and tradition. Once inside, one was immediately immersed in Armenian culture through folk dance performers, culturally-specific delightful foods and pastries, cultural exhibits featuring art, regional costumes and a mock Armenian wedding.

In an effort to build awareness and understanding of mental health concerns in the Armenian community, a LACDMH booth was stocked with over 1,800 outreach materials that were distributed over the two-day event. Attendees were provided with tote bags which contained: pens inscribed with the LACDMH ACCESS number, flyers from local mental health service providers, culturally and linguistically appropriate brochures containing a description of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), and information on mental health, wellness and how Armenian communities can access available resources and services.

Dedicated volunteers were comprised of LACDMH staff, local mental health providers – specifically from the Eastern-European/Middle-Eastern (EE/ME) Integrated Service Management model (ISM) – and EE/ME Under Represented Ethnic Population (UREP) committee members. Volunteers aided in setting up, handing out outreach materials, answering attendees' questions and also offered general information.

Due to considerable stigma in EE/ME culture associated with mental health services, a minimal number of attendees initially approached the booth. Some who approached were past or current employees of Los Angeles County, individuals currently working in the mental health service industry, owners of local pharmacies offering to display translated brochures for their monolingual clients, and individuals who were curious about the acronym LACDMH. To increase engagement, volunteers walked around and distributed outreach material and engaged the attendees in conversations regarding mental health services. Thanks to the active approach on the part of volunteers, which

was well received, more attendees approached to request outreach material and ask general questions.

The hope is that future events such as the annual Armenian festival, which attract Armenians from Glendale and the surrounding areas, will be an additional way to gain access to individuals who would otherwise not be reachable via traditional methods of community mental health outreach. The presence of LACDMH and the EE/ME UREP committee at such events begins mental health conversations amongst the community members, further propelling the overarching goal to reduce disparities and stigma.

For more information on each of the five UREP (Under Represented Ethnic Population) committees: Eastern-European/Middle-Eastern, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, African/African-American, and Latino, please visit <http://psbqi.dmh.lacounty.gov/UREP.htm>